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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000925

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SUBJECT: Child Victims of Maoist Insurgency

REF: KATHMANDU 450

1. Summary. At least eighty-five children have been killed during the six-year-long Maoists insurgency and many others wounded or pressed into service, according to a recent report by a local child-welfare NGO. The conflict will take a heavy psychological toll on Nepal's children, the report concludes. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is "quite concerned" about the status of children affected by the conflict, and would like to engage the Maoists on child rights issues, the ICRC representative in Nepal says. The Maoists have shown no qualms about using child soldiers and appear to be enlisting them in increasing numbers. End Summary.

Effect of Insurgency on Children: The Numbers

2. At least 85 children have been killed as a result of the violent Maoist insurgency launched in February 1996, according to a press release accompanying an annual report on the state of children's rights in Nepal released May 1 by a local NGO, Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN). 41 of these children were killed by Maoist landmines and indiscriminate bombings. [Note: The Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) does not have landmines.] 70 other children have been seriously injured in the conflict. [Comment: CWIN has confirmed 85 child deaths, but this represents the bare minimum and the actual number is certainly much higher. Reliable information about Maoist casualties is not available. The Maoists routinely disfigure or behead their own dead in order to hide their identities. Before recent attacks the Maoists dug mass graves so as to dispose of their fallen comrades more easily. End Comment.]

3. CWIN has received reports of 30 children abducted by the rebels - "Shanghaied" - and two cases of sexual abuse of young girls involved in the Maoist movement. The press release states that 83 minors have been arrested and detained by the police or army. [Note: In February Emboffs interviewed several Maoist child recruits held at an army base near the southwestern city of Nepalgunj, including girls aged 12 and 14 who claimed to have been raped repeatedly (Reftel). End Note.]

Children Traumatized, Marginalized

4. The report notes that although no scientific studies have been carried out on the effects of the insurgency on children, the consequences of the conflict "are directly or indirectly affecting children in their social, physical, mental and emotional development." Thousands of children have suffered psychological trauma. Moreover, children are being further marginalized as funds for health and education have to be diverted for security purposes. In particular, fatal communicable diseases are likely to spread, the report concludes.

5. Maoist attacks on infrastructure - including drinking water and hydropower projects, milk distribution centers and health posts - have also jeopardized the health of Nepal's children. The loss of the electricity supply causes difficulties in delivering many vaccines, for example by breaking the cold chain. These actions will likely lead to an increase in infant mortality in Nepal.

ICRC "Quite Concerned" About Nepal's Children

6. The ICRC representative in Nepal voiced his concern about the situation of Nepal's children in a May 10 meeting with Ambassador. ICRC would like to raise children's rights issues in talks with the Maoists, but has so far been unable to do so. In a mission to Maoist areas in 2001, ICRC personnel did not see many child soldiers, but ICRC has not conducted such missions recently and has no way of knowing whether or not Maoist recruitment of children has increased.

Comment

17. The Maoists have shown no compunction about using children as fighters and cannon fodder. According to recent information - including Reftel interviews with some child soldiers themselves - Maoists have of late begun impressing more and more young people into their ranks. As evidenced by the CWIN report and ICRC's involvement, both local and international institutions are engaged with this issue. This problem will need continued attention because even if an accommodation is eventually reached between the government and the Maoists, many children will be permanently traumatized. According to all concerned, the conflict will have a long-lasting and severe effect on the current generation of Nepalese youth.

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